CONFERENCE connection
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SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

December 15, 2019

Love Brings Light

One of the things I love about Advent and Christmas is the lights! I love Christmas lights! I find myself smiling as I drive around after dark and see the lights. I feel joy inside. Unfortunately, Christmas lights are temporary and eventually disappear. Of course, they would not be as effective in July!

I recently heard someone say that "Love brings light to darkness" - which has me pondering beyond the Christmas lights. Love is something deeper, longer-lasting, and with a broader impact than our artificial lights. "Love brings light to darkness." It is love that illumines the world around us. When we see individuals through love, they are seen as children of God, each one precious to God. When we see creation through the perspective of love, we are motivated to care for this amazing gift that God has entrusted to us.

Love does not ignore the pain and suffering of people but brings hope. Love does not back away with fear but moves forward with courage. Love does not ignore or turn away from situations of injustice but makes injustice visible so others see it and changes are more feasible. The more that love is the basis of our passions and commitments the more that we can see the possibilities, the clarity of focus, and can change the world. Love opens our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts, bringing light to the darkness around us.

I suppose that is why Jesus the Christ is described as the light of the world! When we experience Christ within our lives, like love, our lives and our world are experienced differently. We respond differently and even become

a light to those around us.

May the Advent and Christmas season provide opportunities for you to see and experience the love which brings light to the darkness you experience in your life and the darkness you see around you. And may that light and that love bring you great joy!

Blessings, Char Burch

News from the Conference Office

Southeast Conference Closed for Holidays
The Southeast Conference Office will officially be closed December 24-January 2. Phones will be monitored for emergencies. However, staff will respond to emails beginning on January 2. Thank you!

OCWM Books Close January 9, 2019

The Conference books for OCWM and special offerings for 2019 will close on January 9, 2020. For money to be counted for 2019 OCWM totals, the check **must be received by January 9** to PO Box 1950, Decatur GA 30031. Any checks received *after* January 9 will be put towards 2020 giving. This includes the Christmas Fund, One Great Hour of Sharing, Neighbors in Need, and Strengthen the Church Offerings.

Please make sure the checks are made out to the Southeast Conference with the fund written on the memo line. If you so desire, you can include all the offerings in one check, but please be sure to include a letter detailing what funds how the monies are allocated.

Although our Conference Budget runs October 1- September 30, our OCWM totals for individual churches run Jan 1-December 31. Thank you all for your generous support of the special offerings of the UCC and Our Churches Wider Missions.

From the Generosity Coordinator

Holiday blessings,

As we approach the last few Sundays in the last month of this decade, We Sing Praises to the King!! And he will reign..FOREVER!! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!! In this season of Advent, we are all anticipating 2020 and all of the magnificent blessings that GOD has in store for us.

We thank you ALL for all the ways you have supported, continue to support this conference and for all the ways you serve. We are so grateful and blessed. Thank you for inviting me to your churches and into your homes. I am looking for more visits in 2020.

Friendly reminder: the books will close on January 9, 2019. Please make sure that your year-end OCWM contributions reach the conference office before that date in order to receive credit for your 2019 contributions.

May God continue to bless you all, richly.
Min. Carrole Moss

Climate Justice Event

Congratulations to the Southeast Conference for receiving a special grant from the UCC Brown Continuing Education Fund to sponsor a Special Event on Climate Justice. Rev. Michael Malcolm, our Conference Environmental Justice Representative, is seeking a few folks (clergy or lay) who will serve as a planning committee for the Event. We have the resources, knowledge, and motivation. We just need a few other interested folks to make the event a reality. Interested or questions? Contact Michael at revmalcom@thepeoplesjusticecouncil.org. We need names by January 15, 2020.

Annual Meeting Logo Contest Deadline is Dec 17

We are getting excited in the Southeast Conference for our 2020 Annual Meeting in Montgomery Alabama June 19th and 20th with Rev. Traci Blackmon as our Guest. ARE YOU? Here is one way that you can help us get others excited to join us this year to make our Annual Meeting wonderful.

We need you to help us come up with a unique design/logo centered around this year's theme: "Reflecting on Our Past, Focusing on Our Future" (1 Corinthians 12:12). **The deadline to submit your entry is December 17th, 2019 at midnight.** All submissions must be in JPEG format. Please upload your entry here.

The Annual Meeting Planning Committee will judge the entries in December and the winner will be announced in January.

Youth at Annual Meeting

As plans proceed for Annual Meeting (June 19-20 at Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery, AL), be sure to notice that there will be children and youth programs for all ages! The Planning Committee is busy creating special worship experiences, workshops, optional excursions and information for those who want to spend extra time in Montgomery. Mark your calendars and look for more details!

Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2019. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of December 16

- Jones Chapel Congregational Christian; Woodbury, Georgia
- First Congregational UCC; Marion, Alabama
- Deborah Douglas
- Eulas Kirtdoll
- Angie Wright

Week of December 23

- Pleasant Hill Community Church; Pleasant Hill, Tennessee
- Tiffany Gibson Cox
- Eddie Colf
- Andrew Kim
- Nelson Kittle
- William Wilson Jr

Week of December 30

- Kirkwood UCC; Atlanta, GA
- Jennifer Crane Crenshaw
- Sarah Kim
- Bill Lawrence
- Sharon Temple
- Karl Whiteman

Churches in Transition

Central Congregational, Atlanta, GA; First Congregational, Birmingham AL; Pilgrimage, Marietta GA; First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Peace Church, Clemson SC

News from the Wider Church

Youth Retreat Registration Deadline is Dec. 21

The Winter Youth Retreat 2020 committee announces a "save the date" of January 17-20, 2020. The presenter this year will be Alicia Crosby. Crosby (she/hers) is a justice educator, activist, and (sometimes reluctant) minister whose work addresses the spiritual, systemic, and interpersonal harm people experience. Nashville-based acoustic-electric duo Ocean Elizabeth will be the featured band. This year's theme "Love Who? Love How?" will study the passage of 1 John 4:11-12.

Registration is now open for the Blowing Rock Conference Center Winter Youth Retreat 2020. Dates this year are January 17th-20th. The participant fee this year will be $200 a person. **The registration deadline is 12/21/2019.** Go to the registration site. There are some changes to the paperless registration to help all. Contact the committee if you need help with anything. There's a leader packet available for download at the top of the registration page.

More info is on the event Facebook page: facebook.com/brccwyr/

THE CHRISTMAS FUND
for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

Christmas Fund Ministerial Assistance Program

The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund has been a tangible expression of God's love and light in the world for over 115 years. One of the four Special Mission Offerings of the United Church of Christ, the Christmas Fund provides UCC congregations and members an

opportunity to reach out in compassion to those who have faithfully shepherded our Church and who now find themselves facing worrisome financial needs.

The United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance, the charitable arm of the Pension Boards, on behalf of the whole church, passes on this direct support so that these needs may be met and our support may be felt. Through your gifts to the Christmas Fund, you can help ensure that "The Light Shines in the Darkness" for those who have so faithfully served our church.

Download promotional material, including a fun kid's coloring book, on the Pension Board website.

National Youth Event Coming in July

NYE will happen July 22-25, 2020 at Purdue University in West Lafayette Indiana. This 4-day event brings together young people who have completed 6th through 12th grade. Often bringing in 4,000 participants from around the country, the time is centered on faith, leadership, service and social justice to empower our youth. Cost: $375. Go to http://www.uccpages.org/nye2020/ for video, details, and schedule.

News from our Local Congregations

Join a November 2020 Back Bay Mission Trip

Have you always wanted to 'go on a mission trip" ? This may be your perfect opportunity. Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC has signed up to

take up to 20 people to Back Bay Mission in Biloxi MS for a Mission Trip Nov 8-14, 2020. There is space for a few more people (at least age 14) from the local Pleasant Hill community and the wider Southeast Conference area. All are welcome. Persons wanting information about the trip should plan to attend an information and planning session scheduled for 2:00 pm Saturday afternoon January 11 (inclement weather date Jan 18) at Pleasant Hill Community Church (PHCC) in Pleasant Hill TN. Interested? Contact a Trip Co-Leader: Mary Ruth 931-277-5231 or Vivian Adzaku at vivanera1@yahoo.com

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Oak Grove Church Provides Food Baskets for Needy

Oak Grove Congregational Christian UCC, Pine Mountain, GA provided a warm and gracious welcome to worship to Conference Minister Char Burch on Sunday, December 8th followed by a soup luncheon and creating fruit baskets for distribution.

Birmingham Churches Hold Joint Worship Service

The four UCC churches in Birmingham, AL had their joint Christmas program at Beloved UCC on Sunday, December 8, 2019.

Central Congregational Hosts Alternative Gift Market

Central Congregational United Church of Christ in Atlanta celebrated the first Sunday in Advent by hosting its annual Alternative Gift Market.

Organized by the Practical Theology class with great participation and support from the congregation, nearly $13,000 was raised for Church World Service, Humanity & Inclusion (especially for landmine eradication), UCC Global Ministries Child Sponsorship, Plymouth Harbor, Montclair Elementary School, Lost-N-Found; El Refugio, and more.

Training and Learning Opportunities

MID Retreat Registration Now Open

The Member in Discernment (MID) Retreat will be held in Atlanta on January 31st beginning at 1:00 p.m. and ending by noon on February 1st. This year the focus of the retreat will be a Mental Health First Aid training led by Dr. Kathryn Bryan, PhD, MDiv.

"Mental Health First Aid is a course that teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis." For more information visit https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/about/.

The cost will be $80 which includes all the materials for the training, as well as dinner Friday and lunch Saturday.

REGISTER NOW

Clergy (and Spouse) Retreat: March 8-10, 2020

Can you use some time for rest and relaxation? Can you use an opportunity to reflect on maintaining a balanced lifestyle? Then mark your calendars for this special opportunity for all Authorized Ministers, spouses, and Members in Discernment. The UCC Pension Boards is providing the Conference with this unique opportunity at DuBose Conference Center in Monteagle, TN for a cost of just $20 per person. Watch for more details and registration in January!

Registration is Open for PATHWAYS 2020 Winter

Courses

For inquiries or registration contact registrar@pathwaystheological.org or visit www.pathwaystheological.org.

January 8 - February 18, 2020

- L1.8 Pluralism & Religion in North America (6-weeks) $295
- L2.1 Intro to Spiritual Health (Pastoral Care) (6-weeks) $295
- L3.4 Contemporary Homiletics (6-weeks) $295

January 8 - February 4, 2020

- ESC5 Singing the Bible (4-weeks) $99

Jan. 8 - March 31

- 2.6/2.7 UCC History and Polity (12-weeks) $595

March 4 - April 14

- L1.9 Ethics & A Life of Meaning (6-weeks) $295
- L2.3 Small Church Administration (6-weeks) $295
- L3.6 Professional Boundaries and Ministerial Self-Care (6-weeks) $295
- L3.7 Contextual Theology (6-weeks) $295

March 4 - March 31

- ESC1 What About the Bible? (4-weeks) $99

April 8 - May 5

- ESC13 An Overview of Homosexuality and the Bible (4-weeks) $99

Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders (MSTI)

The Lombard Mennonite Peace Center is once again offering Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders (MSTI) from March 23-27, 2020. This course is for pastors and other church leaders interested in learning skills to help them deal more effectively with interpersonal, congregational, and other forms of group conflict. It will be held at Grace Presbyterian Church in Fort Mill, SC (near Charlotte, NC). Please note that those who register no later than February 21, 2020, will receive a $200 discount off

their tuition. For more information please contact the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center at 630-627-0507 or admin@LMPeaceCenter.org. To register online please go to https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/4316493.

Conference Calendar

Staff Meeting
December 17 @ 9:00 am - 10:30 am EST
Online Virtual Meeting

Conference Office Closed for Christmas Holiday
December 24, 2019 - January 2, 2020

Board of Directors Meeting
January 10, 2020 - January 11, 2020

Winter Youth Retreat
January 17, 2020 - January 20, 2020
Blowing Rock Conference Center, Blowing Rock NC

MID Retreat
January 31, 2020 - February 1, 2020
Atlanta, GA (location TBD)

SEC Clergy Retreat
March 8-10, 2020
Monteagle, TN

SEC Annual Meeting
June 19-20, 2020
Montgomery, AL

National Youth Event
July 22-25, 2020
Purdue University, IN

Contact Us

Conference Minister: **Rev. Char Burch;** cburch@secucc.org

Assoc. Conf. Minister: **Rev. Heather Fosburgh;** hfosburgh@secucc.org

Generosity Coordinator: **Min. Carrole Moss;** cmoss@secucc.org

Director of Communications: **Don Harris;** dharris@secucc.org

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